HOW BELGIUM IS FED

THE WORK OF SAVING A BRAVE NATION FROM STARVATION.

Extracts from a remarkable article in "The Northwestern Miller"

BY

WILLIAM C. EDGAR.

With a Foreword by

PERCY ALDEN, M.P.

PUBLISHED BY

THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR RELIEF IN BELGIUM

TRAFALGAR BUILDINGS, TRAFALGAR SQUARE, LONDON.

KING ALBERT'S MESSAGE.

King Albert sent the following telegram from the front to the Lord Mayor of London, Chairman of the National Committee for Relief in Belgium :—

"The formation of the National Committee for Relief in Belgium testifies to the unfailing generosity of the British nation. Be assured that Belgium will ever remember the brotherly aid so lavishly bestowed. Accept for yourself and the honoured members of your Committee the expression of my sympathetic gratitude.

"ALBERT."

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FOREWORD.

By PERCY ALDEN, M.P.

I HAVE had many opportunities of making acquaintance with the splendid piece of philanthropy described by Mr. Edgar in his interesting article. My first introduction to the work which is being carried on in Belgium itself was made at a little hotel in Flushing while waiting for a train to The Hague. There I met Sir Gilbert Parker and Captain Lucey, of Rotterdam, after their return from Maastricht. The former had been investigating the methods and the organisation of the American Food Commission as it is sometimes called, although, of course, he had not been able to cross the Belgian frontier. I then learnt for the first time how large a number of Americans, many of them business men, but many of them also University students from Yale and Harvard, Princetown and Columbia, and even the "Rhodes" Scholars of Oxford were engaged in the relief of Belgium. Their unceasing labours on behalf of the starving population of that distressed country will furnish a glowing page when the history of the war comes to be written.

Mr. Edgar, who is the editor and principal proprietor of the "Northwestern Miller," an influential American Trade Journal, obtained from generous American millers a cargo of flour for Belgium, valued at £120,000. He did not quite see eye to eye with the American Relief Committee in New York, and went to

Belgium to see for himself if the flour reached the people and if they were in need of it. What Mr. Edgar has here written has the inestimable value of being the opinion of a man who was predisposed to criticise and who was responsible for a cargo of food. All sums received by the National Committee for Relief in Belgium, on the Executive Council of which I have the honour to serve, are handed over intact to the Neutral Commission whose operations are so graphically described by Mr. Edgar.

Belgium makes a piteous appeal to the people of Great Britain, for she has sacrificed herself in the endeavour to keep faith and to maintain her neutrality. I have before me the wooden sabots of a little refugee child. They are worn into large holes and stained with mud. They are not worth a centime, but they typify the agony of blood and tears which has swept over the cities and villages of that land. If only we had sufficient imagination to picture the countless tragedies which have been enacted, the burnings and pillagings that followed the invasion, the shooting of many hundreds of innocent civilians, men, women and children, we should not hesitate in face of all this suffering to come to the rescue of those who are left behind.

Many millions of Belgians run the risk of starvation, one and a-half millions are utterly destitute. Belgium in proportion to its population was perhaps the richest country in Europe. For centuries towns like Antwerp, Bruges, Cambrai, Ghent, Liége and Ypres have been commercial centres of importance. To-day Ypres is nothing but a mass of bricks and mortar, while industrial life is at a standstill even in the cities that remain intact. Throughout the war zone the little farms and homesteads that studded the fields of Flanders have disappeared in ruins, ground to powder by the

weight of shell and high explosives. The farmers and peasants whose ceaseless toil had transformed the countryside into a veritable garden have now witnessed the destruction of all that they held most dear.

This brave people must not be allowed to die for want of food. Every penny subscribed by the generous British public to the National Committee for Relief in Belgium is spent in feeding those who will perish without our aid. Nothing whatever is deducted for expenses, a fact to which I can bear witness. We owe it to King Albert—that heroic figure—whose "head is bloody but unbowed," we owe it to the devoted nation that lies beneath the yoke, we owe it to ourselves, since we swore fealty to her cause that this reproach should never be brought against us—Belgium shed her blood in the cause of liberty and freedom, but England allowed her children to perish. May we not rather say of Belgium in the words of the poet:—

"Thou hast great allies:
Thy friends are exultations, agonies,
And love—and man's unconquerable mind."

PATIENTLY WAITING FOR FOOD AND CLOTHING IN BRUSSELS.

A Hand-to-Hand Contest with Hunger.

By WILLIAM C. EDGAR.

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AS soon as possible after the cargo of the "South Point" (the steamer which brought the "Northwestern Millers'" flour from America) had been unloaded into barges at Rotterdam and shipped to Belgium, I followed it. Having procured the necessary endorsements on my American passport, and several other documents required to pass through the German lines, I travelled by rail to Bergen-op-Zoom, where I met the motor car of the Commission for Relief in Belgium, in charge of its courier, Mr. Stephens, a young American who had volunteered for this service.

After luncheon, we started for the frontier, the car being driven by a Belgian in the employ of the Commission. At Putte, a small town extending on both sides of the frontier, we dismounted and submitted to an examination of our passports and papers, our baggage and persons. This being to the satisfaction of the German guards, we were allowed to proceed. Within two hours we reached Antwerp, having been required to show our passports several times, and stopped at the offices of the Commission in that city.

Here I was met by the Director-General in Belgium for the Commission, whose headquarters are in Brussels, and made the remainder of the journey to the capital in his car. Passing through Malines, we reached Brussels about seven o'clock.

The following morning I reported at the offices of the Commission, and in order to become familiar with its system of distribution, placed myself at its disposal for the remainder of my stay in Belgium. I was proffered every possible facility for investigation by the courteous officers of the Belgian branch, who gave me a cordial welcome and did everything in their power to assist me.

In order that the methods of supply and distribution of food and other necessaries in Belgium may be clearly understood, it is desirable to explain the origin, functions and scope of two organisations which, co-operating, are now able to perform this arduous and difficult task, and which, combined, probably constitute the most remarkable and effective agency of national relief that was ever known.

HOW THE COMMISSION STARTED.

When it became evident that the supply of food-stuffs in Belgium was rapidly approaching exhaustion, and that famine threatened the civil population, Mr. Brand Whitlock, the American Minister in Brussels, and the Marquis de Villalobar, the Spanish Minister, co-operating with the leading Belgium residents, sought an understanding with the various belligerents' governments whereby imports of food could be arranged for, thus to avert the impending calamity. This understanding was negotiated with the German military authorities through the Ministers in Brussels, and with the Allies through the American and Spanish Ambassadors in London.

Immediately following the completion of this arrangement, in October, Mr. Page, the American Ambassador, induced Mr. Herbert C. Hoover, a well-known American business man resident in London, to undertake the formation of the Commission for Relief in Belgium. Calling to his assistance a group of Americans who have been engaged in large undertakings in various parts of Europe, and who are recognised as men of experience and business sagacity, Mr. Hoover established an effective organisation in a remarkably short time, of which the American and Spanish Ambassadors in London, the American Ambassadors in Paris and Berlin, the American and Spanish Ministers in Brussels, and the American Minister in The Hague are Honorary Chairmen, Mr. Hoover being Chairman and Executive Officer, and the group of Americans constituting what might be termed his cabinet. These gentlemen, serving without remuneration and at their own expense, put aside their private affairs, some of these of immense importance, and devoted themselves exclusively to the onerous task before them, bringing to bear upon its problems that spirit of initiative, energy and resource which is characteristic of the highest type of the American man of affairs. The work required not only great ability and infinite tact, but unfailing courage and a determination to overcome obstacles, however insurmountable they might seem to be.

ALL THE HORRORS OF FAMINE.

The purpose of the Commission was to feed the civil population of Belgium, regardless of all difficulties, and this population was estimated at more than six million,* a large

* Mr. Edgar, in his desire not to exaggerate, underestimates. The population in Belgium is now over seven millions.

number of them entirely destitute. The Commission's charter was the undertaking negotiated through Ambassador Page and Minister Whitlock with the belligerent governments, whereby the free passage of food supplies to Belgium was authorised, and its absolute protection from conversion to military purposes and its immunity from requisition by the military authorities guaranteed.

The Commission, therefore, was granted an absolute monopoly for this service, and no other agency whatever has been permitted to compete or interfere with it. It has, therefore, been the sole means whereby it has been possible to secure food or other necessary supplies for the Belgian people, and had it not been for this essentially American organisation, there is no question whatever that the civil population of the country would have experienced all the terrific horrors of a famine.

HOLLAND'S HELP.

The co-operation and approval of the Netherlands Government was also necessary to the success of the Commission, since all supplies must pass through Holland. This has been given in unfailing and most generous measure, and the authorities of the Netherlands have done everything possible to assist and co-operate, often contributing most valuable help to the movement, notwithstanding that Holland herself is caring for an enormous number of Belgian refugees at a very heavy expense. The assistance rendered by generous Holland to the work of the Commission has been recently recognised by the appointment of a representative of that Government to the directorate of the organisation.

WHAT IT COSTS.

The requirements of Belgium for food supplies necessitate an expenditure of more than £1,200,000 a month, to which must be added £300,000 more for transportation, making a total outlay of £1,500,000 monthly. It has been necessary for the Commission, not only to purchase and forward this food, but somehow to find the money to pay for it. This has been accomplished, and for more than six months requirements have been met despite all obstacles and difficulties, an achievement which, under existing circumstances, is little short of miraculous. It has required supreme faith as well as great business courage.

THE WORLD'S AID.

Although the world has seemed to be generous in contributing towards Belgian relief, and although the Commission has co-operated with every benevolent effort made in providing food through which to keep the people alive, yet, reduced to actual figures, the world's gifts have been small compared with the vast sums actually expended.

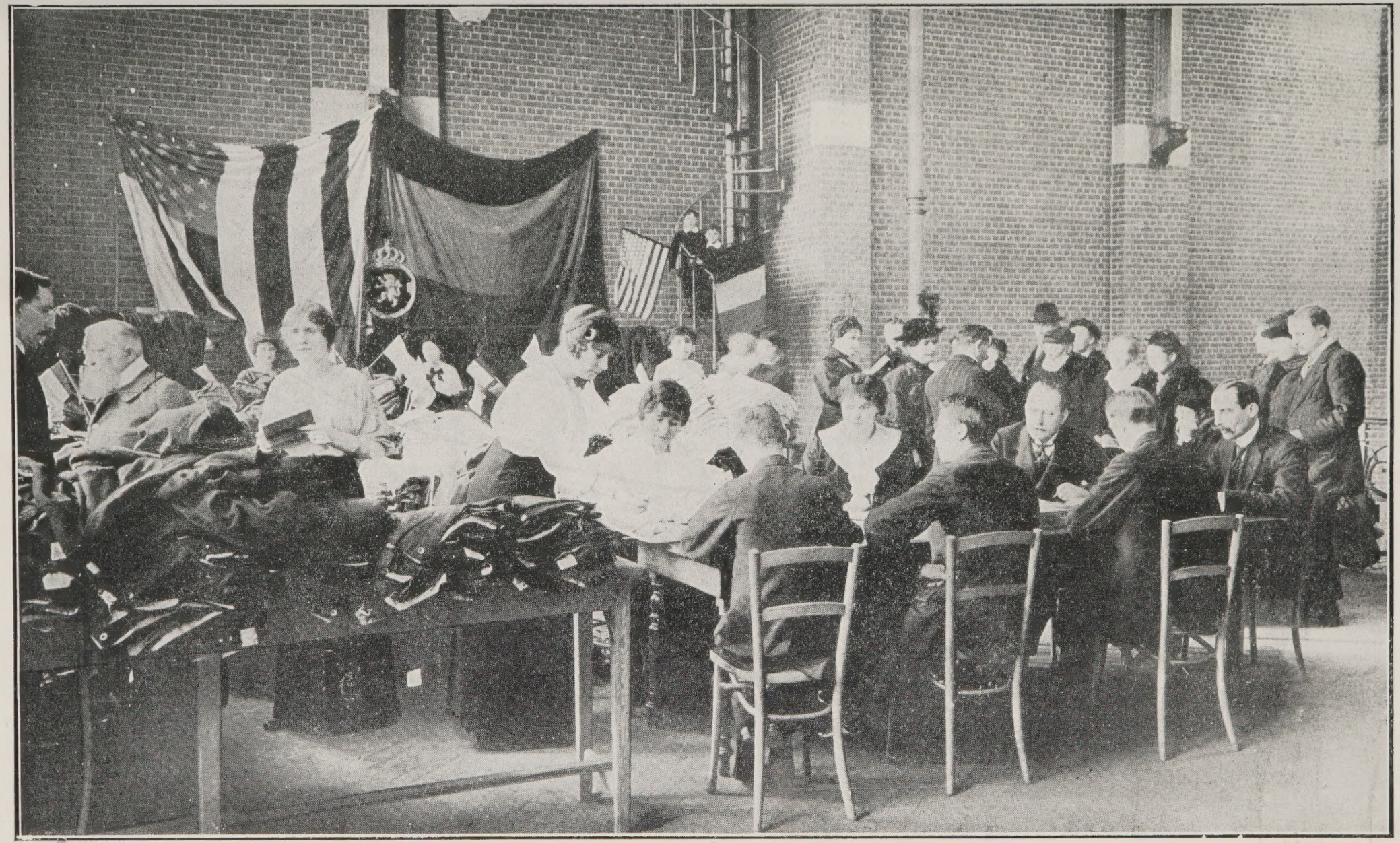
This is not said in disparagement of the world's liberality ; on the contrary, individual contributors have been exceedingly generous, considering the numerous and very heavy demands made upon them in these times. It is stated merely to show how little can charity alone be relied upon to meet a national emergency of this kind, and how complex have been the ever-pressing financial problems of the Commission.

On March 6th the liabilities of the Commission, as shown by its Balance Sheet, were estimated at £1,400,000 in excess of its cash resources. Nevertheless, its indomitable Chairman goes ahead with his work, confident that means will be found to meet liabilities as they mature, and believing that, in the end, the world will not let Belgium starve for lack of money wherewith to buy her people food. With a sublime faith and courage the Commission continues its hand-to-hand contest with hunger, realizing that should it fail in its task, famine will come upon Belgium, which is not now, nor has it ever been, more than three weeks removed from complete exhaustion of food supplies.

For the splendid work of the Commission, rather than for the generosity of the people of the United States, although that has been notable, the Belgians have reason to be thankful, and show that sense of obligation to America which they now exhibit so emphatically and sincerely. Americans have given much, and it has greatly helped, but it has been little in comparison with the value of the services rendered by the Commission.

SOURCES OF FOOD SUPPLY.

As exports of food-stuffs are prohibited from all European countries, and it is impossible to purchase supplies for Belgium therein, the Commission looks to the United States and Argentina for the provisions which are required to feed Belgium. These consist mainly of flour and wheat, bacon and rice, with considerable quantities of maize, intended for cattle food. The supply of potatoes, at one time plentiful



SORTING CLOTHES SENT FROM HAPPIER LANDS.

in Belgium, is now almost exhausted, and it is highly desirable to secure a large quantity. Owing to the difficulty of transporting potatoes long distances in good condition this, at present, seems impossible.

INCREDIBLY SMALL EXPENSES.

Owing to the fact that all officials and directors and a very large proportion of the staff of the Commission serve without pay, the expense of operation is incredibly small, and probably unparalleled in this respect by any charitable organisation in the world.

From October 22nd to March 6th, during which period purchases were effected amounting to £3,000,000, the general expenses of the London office, including cables, postage, salaries, travelling, printing, stationery, accountants' and auditors' fees and sundries, were but £5,200; the expenses of the Rotterdam and Brussels branches were but a trifle more than this amount.

SHIPPING DIFFICULTIES.

If the Commission had only to find the money and purchase supplies, its task would be sufficiently great; but, in addition thereto, it has had the greatest difficulty in procuring ocean transportation, even when willing to pay enormous rates. The increasing scarcity of ships, and the unwillingness of owners to divert vessels from their regular routes, not to mention the augmented risk of North Sea navigation, involved in carrying food supplies to Holland, have combined to make this part of the Commission's work exceedingly hard. Nevertheless, the ships are being procured, although the premiums paid have added considerable expense to the transportation account.

THE BELGIAN ORGANISATION.

In the foregoing I have given an outline of the organisation and functions of the Commission for Relief in Belgium. It remains, for a proper understanding of the system by which more than six million people in a state of suspended animation are being taken care of, to explain the operations of the Belgian ally of the Commission, through which it is enabled to distribute food supplies, to an alien people, and to do so by methods which are at once the quintessence of sound common-sense in their business operation, and the most tactful and considerate in their charitable aspect.

Like the Commission itself, this co-operating Belgian organisation, the Comité National de Secours et d'Alimentation, is not an institutional, long-established, highly endowed association, with its usual concomitants of honorary, inactive officers and salaried employees. It is provisional, and owes its existence to the emergency, summoning to its service, wholly in behalf of humanity, the most representative among the financiers, manufacturers and men of affairs remaining in Belgium during this period of national stress.

The functions of this association of Belgians, profoundly concerned in the preservation of the civil population of the country, are to ensure proper organisation of the communal distribution, to collect moneys from the communes from the sale of food, and to account for the same, to grant subsidies to the communes in proportion to their several necessities, and to determine, by periodic convocation of its delegates, in conjunction with the Commission, the needs of each special locality.

I had the honour of attending two of the weekly meetings of this organisation, and was much impressed by the diligence, earnestness and thoroughness with which these gentlemen, representative of the best financial and industrial elements in Belgium, discussed the business brought before them.

The President of the Comité National is Mr. Ernest Solvay, whose manufacturing operations are world-wide in their scope. Mr. Jean Jadot, Governor of the Société General de Belgique, and Mr. L. Van der Rest, Vice-Governor of the Banque Nationale de Belge, are its Vice-Presidents. The Honorary Secretary is Mr. F. Van Bree. Mr. Emile Francqui, the eminent financier, is Chairman of the Executive Committee, and among its members are men of the highest attainments in their several spheres of activity : Mr. Josse Allard, Baron Coppee, Baron Janssen, Baron Lambert, F. M. Phillippsohn, L. Franck, P. Van Hoegaerden and many others.

AN UNPRECEDENTED COMBINATION.

The relations existing between the Commission and the Comité National are direct and harmonious. The former may be likened to a free arm, the connecting link between the helpless Belgian population and the outside world, which stretches across the Atlantic and procures the food

supplies, delivering them, under international guarantees, to Belgium ; the Comité National to the other arm, which, unable to extend itself beyond the limitations imposed by war conditions, receives the supplies and concerns itself with their just, conscientious and wise distribution, thus to protect all and do the greatest amount of good to the largest possible number. Both arms are a part of the same body, operating jointly for its benefit, and having in view one object only—the maintenance of the Belgian people until such time as, peace being restored, they can care for themselves. The functions of these two organisations are co-ordinated to one common purpose, thereby achieving a system of national relief which, for effectiveness, wisdom and intelligent activity, is wholly unprecedented.

It has probably never before occurred in the history of nations that representatives of a neutral country, remote from the scene of the war, have voluntarily come forward to interpose between conflicting armies for the preservation of the civilian population. Certainly, no such group has ever before worked with a provisional organisation composed of leading citizens of the country thus relieved, in joint operation for a common object. The performance of the Commission for Relief in Belgium in thus interposing and effecting a co-operative arrangement is altogether unexampled, and affords an amazing illustration of what can be accomplished by the genius of American business, joining with that of Belgium, when it applies itself to humanitarian work with the same energy and intelligence that it ordinarily exerts in industrial and commercial channels.

THE RESULT.

It infallibly follows that with the best business spirit of two countries willingly and gratuitously devoted to the problem before it, and the communal system of Belgium, admirably adapted to purposes of individual relief, with methods of transportation by waterways most conveniently available, a process of ultimate individual distribution should be evolved which is ideal in its characteristics, complete in its scope and fundamentally sound in its operations.

I am, therefore, able to say without the slightest mental reservation whatever, that although I have had occasion in the past to inspect many methods of public relief in various countries, I have never before seen one that can compare in efficiency, thoroughness and wisdom with the system

now being employed in Belgium through the combined efforts of the Commission and the Comité National.

Furthermore, if I had a million or five million dollars placed at my disposal for the relief of the Belgians, I would not hesitate for a moment to put it at the command of this organisation, confident that it would employ it to the best possible advantage of the people, and that not a dollar would be wasted or misapplied.

A SMALL ARMY OF COOKS PREPARES THE CITY'S SOUP.

In making such an unqualified expression of confidence, I speak as the result of a careful study of the methods being used, and of my personal observations of the work, both in the large cities and the provinces of Belgium. It gives me great satisfaction to write this voluntary indorsement, because I was instrumental in securing and delivering to this organisation a cargo of flour valued by the Commission at £120,000, and "The Northwestern Miller," the publication I have the honour to represent, was pledged to see to its proper delivery and distribution.

USELESS WASTE OF LIFE AVERTED.

It is solely due to the efforts of this allied agency that the civil population of Belgium has been preserved from want during this terrible period. It has not only provided food, for both the people and their animals, but it has supplied the former with clothing and kept them housed, besides giving employment to a very large number of persons.

Through its operation, the currency of the country has been maintained as a circulating medium, taken everywhere in Belgium at par ; and by keeping the population fed, clothed, sheltered and occupied, it has served to maintain peace, and has prevented futile uprisings against the military authorities, which could only have resulted in useless waste of life and further destruction of property.

It is estimated that fifty thousand people are engaged in the service of the Commission and the Comité National combined, and the ramifications of their activities include the collection of funds, purchase of supplies, operation of steamships and barges, maintenance of warehouses, supervision and control of all the mills, bakeries and provision stores in Belgium, the conduct of many workshops, employing labour, both male and female, which is otherwise unable to procure work, sale of commodities, distribution of supplies, care of the destitute, and a very considerable banking business, whereby the currency received is converted into exchange by which supplies are purchased. Next to the military government of Belgium, the Commission and its ally, the Comité National, constitute the most influential and powerful authority in that country.

EVERY POUND OF FOOD ACCOUNTED FOR.

In this combined organisation is found practically a substitute for civil government *ad interim* ; its charter, the international agreement by which it is permitted to exercise its functions, and its fundamental basis, the primary requisite of man—his daily bread.

Beginning with its ability to furnish bread, the organisation has gradually extended its scope. Its basis of credit is the commune, which purchases what it can and is supplied according to its needs. The commune's payments are made under supervision of the Commission, to the Comité National, which in turn, pays the receipt over to the Commission

receiving the supplies either given to or purchased by the latter. Thus every pound of food or every article furnished is strictly accounted for, all accounts being duly audited and checked by chartered accountants.

BREAD IN BELGIUM AS CHEAP AS IN ENGLAND.

The price of bread throughout Belgium is fixed and regulated by the Commission. At no time since it began

SOUP AND BREAD ARRIVING FOR THE HUNGRY.

its operations has this price been higher than in England during a corresponding period.

The Commission has maintained a supply of food-stuffs in Belgium sufficient to enable the Comité National to supply the people with a ration of 250 grammes of flour, equivalent to 325 grammes of bread, *per capita per diem.* This was, for a time, reduced to 250 grammes of bread, but this was due to a local desire to conserve resources and accumulate a small reserve stock, not to actual necessity.

£500,000 A MONTH REQUIRED.

It should be understood that all supplies shipped into Belgium by the Commission, whether gifts or purchases, are sold. There is no free distribution direct from the Commission to the people, for this would demoralise the entire system.

The supplies are sold to the commune, according to the requirements of its population, and the commune pays the Commission, or, if it is unable to do so, it gives an obligation to pay. The commune, through its local organisation, affiliated with the Comité National, sells the flour or bread to the individuals who have the means to pay, charging a reasonable profit over the cost; to those who have no means it distributes food free. Naturally, the number of those unable to pay is gradually increasing as the cash resources of the people diminish.

The discrepancy between the amount realised from the sales of food and the amount required to feed those without means to pay; that is, the difference between the provisioning and the benevolent departments, now amounts to about £500,000 a month, and this sum it is necessary for the Commission to procure from benevolent sources.

RICH AND POOR TREATED ALIKE.

In all Belgium there is but one basis of bread supply. Rich or poor, all alike receive the same quantity of bread, and it is of the same quality, according to the standard of the individual community as established by its local authorities, who act under instructions from the Commission and the Comité National. It is not possible to bring any food-stuffs into the country except through the Commission; hence the supply must depend entirely upon the amount it is able to procure and forward, and the application of the individual ration is universal.

However great a man's means may be, his allowance of bread is fixed. He may be able to supply his table with soup, fish, meat and poultry, to offer his guests wines of rare vintage and priceless value, but the bread he puts beside his plate is of the same quality and the same quantity as that received by the humblest citizen.

RECEIVING THEIR PITIFUL DAILY RATION.

NO FOOD GOES TO THE GERMANS.

In a previous communication to "The Northwestern Miller," I mentioned that the German military authorities in Belgium were preserving, in letter and spirit, the engagement entered into with the Commission whereby they undertook not to requisition any food supplies shipped into Belgium for the use of the civil population.

The possibility of contrary action was a deterrent influence in securing contribution to the cargo of the "South Point," and therefore I am gratified to reassure contributors on this score.

Neither directly nor indirectly has any levy been made on these supplies for military purposes, nor have the beneficiaries of relief been penalized by being obliged to pay additional war contributions or taxes because they were receiving aid from without.

In every respect, the military authorities have been scrupulously observant of their obligations in respect to these supplies, being willing not only to permit their distribution, but as far as it is compatible with military regulations, to afford every possible facility for the free and uninterrupted transaction of all business connected with the work of relief.

Neither in the larger cities nor in the provinces through which I travelled while in Belgium, did I hear a single complaint from American or Belgian that the German soldiers were taking the slightest advantage of the people in appropriating to themselves, either by direct or indirect means, any portion, however slight, of the food supplied through the Commission.

COOKING THE DAILY RATION.

My first effort to understand the system of relief was made in Brussels, and began with the place where the soup is prepared for communal distribution. This central depot was formerly a station or warehouse used for sorting and despatch of packages and parcels. It is a large, open-spaced, circular building, with a high-domed roof, through which light is admitted, and it is admirably suited for the purpose to which it is now being put.

A small army of cooks was employed in chopping up vegetables and meat to go into the huge kettles, boiling and seething and smoking on the stone floors. There was

a cheerful clatter of wooden shoes, and a fragrant aroma of steaming soup. Large vans rolled in and out through the wide doors, carrying to distributing stations the supply of soup for the noontime calls.

Standing about, testing, tasting and superintending the soup-making, were a group of Brussels restaurant keepers, who have volunteered their services to see that the people obtain an excellent quality of soup, and that nothing is wasted. These men come on duty very early in the morning, and divide their forces into watches, so that, at all times, the soup supply is under direct supervision of expert purveyors, who thoroughly understand their business.

The scene was most interesting, and presented many striking and picturesque aspects; here a man swinging on his shoulder a huge basket of ingredients, there another bending over a great kettle, stirring its contents up with a long ladle; others carrying between them covered cans from which the steam escaped in odorous clouds. The dignified supervisors gave as much care and thought to the preparation of free food as if the product were destined to go upon the tables of their own restaurants, there to be submitted to the critical judgment of their most discriminating patrons.

The Belgian cooks are magnificent soup-makers, and unexcelled in the economy and ingenuity with which they combine and utilize almost everything to produce a savoury and strengthening result. I never tasted a richer or better soup than the bowl I tried at this central depot of supply, and its flavour might well excite the envy of any restaurant keeper.

IN THE BREAD LINES.

From this interesting and fascinating scene we proceeded to one of the communal distributing places, where the people come for their daily supply of bread and soup. This was an enormous building, situated in the centre of a thickly populated district, mainly tenanted by the poorer classes.

Originally, a convent, and later a prison, this building had been ordered to be torn down by the municipal authorities before the war began, to make room for needed improvements. Its dark and lofty stone corridors and cloisters, its vast dimly-lighted chambers and small stone cells, make a picturesque and striking background for the

long line of men and women who entered and passed through receiving their supply of food. It suggested a prison of the French Revolution rather than a modern environment.

There are some who cannot look upon this scene without sadness, because so many are in the line who never before have had to apply for relief, but to me this feeling was counterbalanced by one of thankfulness and satisfaction that, through the efforts of others, especially my own countrymen, all were being fed and well fed.

I have seen many bread lines, and some of them very depressing, but none which impressed me quite as much as this in the character of the people composing it. Most of them were women and girls, with an occasional man, usually an old one. These were clearly not mendicants; there was nothing servile or shrinking about them.

NO WHINE OR WHIMPER.

The Belgian, whether in the cities or the provinces, receives aid in a self-respecting, straightforward fashion. He is not a beggar or dependent by profession. Under ordinary circumstances he is hard-working, thrifty and self-supporting, asking odds of nobody. In this emergency, due to no fault of his own, he is debarred by the fortunes of war from helping himself. He is willing to accept help, and he does so temporarily without the loss of self-respect, because shortage of food and lack of means are the common lot, due to national stagnation. He receives rations, not charity, and he so accepts them, thankfully, but not cringingly, standing up to his misfortunes without whine or whimper. There is no danger of pauperizing the Belgians.

Behind a long counter sat the volunteers engaged in superintending the noontime distribution; several clerks receiving, checking and examining the bread and soup tickets, a kindly priest assisting. At one end entered the people. Emerging from a long stone corridor connecting with the street, they passed quietly and in order through the necessary examination to the other side of the room, where, from the soup supply, was measured out the quantity the ticket called for, and, from a large pile of loaves, each one of exact size and weight, was given bread, according to the measure authorised.

There was nothing rude, brusque or curt in this individual distribution. Courtesy, gentleness, tact and consideration

A PUBLIC SALE OF FOOD IN BRUSSELS.

were shown on both sides. The manners of the applicants and the distributers were alike above reproach.

Madame and Monsieur were titles interchanged with great frequency, with many "merci's" and "pardon's," and enquiries as to the health of members of the family, with kindly words and good wishes passing back and forth between disbursers and recipients.

Those who could, paid something, and the chink of coppers falling on the long table was heard frequently, but all received their supply according to the needs of the family they represented, whether or not they had the means to pay for it. There was no pushing or crowding, no disputes, no altercations; the distribution proceeded in the utmost quietness and order, but it was appallingly interminable, the line reaching through the corridor, down the narrow outside street and around the corner out of sight.

BRUSSELS' BREAD AS GOOD AS LONDON'S.

In Brussels and the Province of Brabant, no attempt has been made recently to mill from imported wheat; in consequence imported flour is exclusively provided. From this, excellent white bread is being produced, giving entire satisfaction to the public. Indeed, the bread of Brussels is quite as good as, if not better than, that of Rotterdam or London.

It was not always thus, however. At one time, what is called "gray bread" was provided, much to the displeasure of the consumers. I have in my possession an illustrated post card, unobjectionable from the naïve standpoint of the Belgian populace, but hardly suited to publication in an American journal, which humorously shows the effect of this bread upon the population, and is significant of the distaste for it exhibited by the people. Now, however, the citizens of Brussels and Brabant, as well as Antwerp, rejoice in what they call "the good American bread," and show their gratification in innumerable ways.

CARD-INDEXING A CITY.

It will hardly be believed that it is possible to card-index the inhabitants of a city of five hundred thousand population, giving the name and address of each family, each hotel and each restaurant, with the number of the people entitled to draw bread rations, but Mr. Lewis Richards, in charge

HOW BELGIUM'S HUNGRY CHILDREN ARE FED.

of this section of the work, proved to me, not only that it was possible, but it was actually done in the case of the city of Brussels, as provisioned by the Commission and the Comité National.

Doubting the thoroughness of this system, I asked for the card showing the requirements of bread for the hotel where I was stopping, the Palace. Mr. Richards promptly produced it. Thereon was indicated how much bread was daily required to feed the staff of the hotel, and how much for the guests, these figures being revised and verified frequently.

An entire floor of the Commission's headquarters is occupied by the staff required to keep close watch of the food supply and requirements of the city, and a small army of clerks is kept busy at work.

Mr. Richards has under his jurisdiction the control of the bakeries and supply stores of Brussels. To the former is given a certain amount of flour, from which they are required to produce a definite quantity of bread, the quality of which is carefully inspected. All establishments are given flour in proportion to the number of their customers, and no individual is permitted to duplicate his allowance or that of his household, if he has one.

318,000 DESTITUTE IN LIÉGE ALONE.

Via the forlorn but famous town of Visé, with its tragic history, where we stopped for a brief time, we reached Liége and proceeded to the handsome residence of Mr. Van Hoegaerden, now generously turned over to the uses of the relief organisation.

Liége is the centre of a large manufacturing district, and its requirements of food are heavy. The province had a population of 865,000. It suffered terribly at the beginning of the war, nearly 4,500 houses having been burned. 22,000 people are still homeless, 165,000 workmen are idle, and 318,000 people are destitute.

"A VERY NOBLE CORPS."

I returned without accident or important incident safely to Holland, leaving Belgium with sincere regret, not only because of the friends I have made there, whom I shall always remember with pleasure and gratitude for their many kindnesses and courtesies to me, but because I left

behind me on the fighting line, opposed to the treacherous army of hunger, a very noble corps of devoted, self-sacrificing men and women, Belgians and Americans, bravely and uncomplainingly doing work for humanity under difficulties and even dangers; courageous, patient, indomitable, self-effacing; subordinating all personal desires to the need of the hour: the preservation of the civil population of Belgium until peace is restored to a torn, shattered and disrupted country.

"ALL HONOUR TO THIS GALLANT ARMY."

They have risen to the emergency with the everlasting martyr spirit. Their work is not for a few weeks or months, but it has continued unintermittently now for more than six months, and its conclusion is still indefinitely in the future. They alone, by the help of the Commission for Relief in Belgium at London and its branches, stand between a population, with the addition of Northern France added, of nine million souls and absolute hunger and destitution.

With reverence and with bared head I say, all honour to this gallant army fighting the good fight so well and truly. May God help them, and keep them, and send them the support and succour from the outside world that their great cause warrants, and their scrupulous fidelity to their trust justifies.

WILLIAM C. EDGAR.

ROTTERDAM,

March 31, 1915.

NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR RELIEF IN BELGIUM.

TRAFALGAR BUILDINGS, TRAFALGAR SQUARE, LONDON, W.C.

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HON. SECRETARY.
W. A. M. GOODE, ESQ.

ON behalf of seven million Belgians, who have dared to stay in their native land, we appeal to our fellow-countrymen throughout the British Empire. A great emergency has arisen; an emergency which involves our national honour. We are well aware of the magnificent response already made by generous and patriotic individuals to appeals for funds during the present war; yet, under the circumstances, we do not hesitate to say that we must make further and even greater sacrifices to meet the emergency of saving the people now left in Belgium from the horrors of slow starvation. No victory could be lastingly glorious if it involved the decimation by famine of a small nation that deliberately sacrificed itself rather than sacrifice its honour.

From the day when the people in Belgium laid down their land and their lives for the sake of their country's independence and the honourable fulfilment of its undertaking to maintain a perpetual neutrality, the German Army of occupation has refused to feed them. They have been kept alive only by the merciful and effective interposition of a neutral Commission for Relief, formed under the auspices of the American and Spanish diplomatic representatives in Brussels and London. That Commission, of which Mr. Herbert Hoover is Chairman, has worked miracles by arranging for the importation into Belgium, in the face of unparalleled difficulties, of food supplies valued at over £10,000,000. The philanthropy, rendered necessary by the large number of destitute who cannot pay for their food, has been generously aided by the United States and the British Dominions. No appeal has been

made by Mr. Hoover's Commission in the United Kingdom because, as neutrals, they quite properly considered this was not within their province. Mr. Hoover and Mr. Francqui, Chairman of the Commission in Brussels, now write :—

" Unless we get more assistance hundreds of thousands of the seven million people still in Belgium will actually starve. At least a million and a-half Belgians are now entirely destitute. With the rapid exhaustion of the meat and vegetable supplies there will probably be, before harvest time, 2,500,000 in Belgium who must be fed and clothed solely by charity. The remaining 4,500,000 will get their pitiful daily allowance of bread through the Commission and will pay for it. **Will you help us to keep the destitute alive** ? "

To this question there can only be one answer. Having satisfied themselves that His Majesty's Government saw no objection, the undersigned have formed the National Committee for Relief in Belgium, **in the confident belief that the people of the British Empire will not allow the bulk of the Belgian nation to die for lack of bread.**

In providing a national channel for every part of the British Empire through which benevolence to meet this emergency shall directly and safely reach the Belgians in Belgium, it is also intended to consolidate the existing philanthropic efforts in this direction.

As it is obviously impossible for any British subject to enter the occupied part of Belgium, the representatives of the neutral Commission will distribute the relief purchased from the National Committee's funds. Mr. Whitlock, the American Minister in Brussels, on March 29th, wrote as follows :—

" I am glad to be able to say that there is not a single instance in which a pound of food sent under our guarantee has been touched by the German authorities."

In conjunction with the Belgian " Comité de Secours " and under the supervision of neutral Americans actually in Belgium, a system of distribution has been organised so perfectly as to make it almost physically impossible for a German soldier to touch one loaf of Belgian bread. All the neutral authorities on the spot are convinced that if the supplies of food to Belgium are discontinued the Germans will act up to their declaration that they will not, or cannot, save the seven million people from starving to death.

To keep body and soul together in the 1,500,000 who are now utterly destitute £500,000 a month is required. The desolating hand of war has throttled Belgium's industries and pauperised almost a third of her population. In Liége 30,000 women, old men, children and cripples daily line up to get their half-pound of bread and their pint of soup. In Malines, 25,000 out of 40,000

are entirely destitute ; in Brussels nearly 250,000 Belgians wait every day for their bread of tears. Babies and children are barely being kept alive for want of milk. So it is throughout all the country where those who stayed and bravely faced the invader are now dependent upon the mercy of the world. And if that mercy is denied, the amazing self-restraint of these seven million people will collapse. Under the impelling anguish of hunger they may be tempted to strike desperately, but with tragic unarmed futility, and will be shot down, like so many wild creatures, in streets that were lost by sacrifice as noble as the world has ever known.

Only organised effort on an unprecedented scale will avert this tragedy. In caring for the 200,000 Belgian refugees now in this country, we are apt to forget that the great bulk of the Belgian nation—at least seven millions of them—are living under conditions of such misery as can scarcely be conceived by a people who, like ourselves, have been spared the horrors of invasion.

Faced with a situation from which there is no immediate escape, deprived of their freedom, the people of desolated Belgium only ask from us enough bread to keep themselves alive. Shall it ever be said that we denied them this ?

Food cannot be exported from this country to Belgium, but the donations so urgently needed to buy it should be sent to the Hon. Treasurer, Mr. A. Shirley Benn, M.P., Trafalgar Buildings, Trafalgar Square, London, W.C., or to the local Committees when they exist. The working expenses of the National Committee have all been generously provided for, and every penny or every pound received by the Treasurer will, without any deduction whatever, reach the long-suffering Belgians in the form of food.

Signed on behalf of the National Committee :

Charles Johnston, Lord Mayor of London, *Chairman.*

Randall Cantuar.
Archbishop of Canterbury.

Francis Cardinal Bourne.

Thomas Nicol,
Moderator, Church of Scotland.

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